



2019 Region 4 – Prairie Area Grizzly Bear Management Efforts

Period Covered: 12/01/2018 – 11/30/2019

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Synopsis

Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks-Region 4 hired a new Bear Management Specialist and a Bear Technician to cover areas where grizzlies are expanding. These positions are based in Conrad and began at the end of July 2017. Below is a summary of efforts for the second full calendar year of this position (December 2018 through November 2019). Grizzly bears remain listed under the Endangered Species Act, despite being biologically recovered. Thus, final grizzly bear management decisions are under the authority of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.



Figure 1: Grizzly bear outreach and education at Cascade Hutterite Colony.

Conflict Prevention and Response Efforts

- Conducted 22 bear aware outreach events or presentations to over 565 people (Fig. 1)
- Conducted bear spray trainings to over 363 people
- Erected a permanent electric fence for a sheep pasture totaling over 4,000 perimeter feet
- Repaired and maintained two existing permanent electric fences
- Erected 10 temporary electric fences (two given to sheep producer for permanent use)
- Removed over 2,000 pounds of spilled or spoiled grain

- We removed >17 deer carcasses and >42 livestock carcasses for 12 producers (Figure 2)
- The carcass removal driver picked up at least: 14 cows, 29 calves, eight bulls, one yearling, and three gut piles for nine producers
- Deployed 15 wildlife scare devices
- Installed four bear aware signs at key recreational locations to help human safety
- Obtained six bear proof garbage cans from Western Bear Foundation
- We gave away over 43 bear sprays
- Responded to every bear call (over 374), including non-conflict grizzly bear observations and general bear-related inquiries
- Over 71 Facebook conversations and over 109 text message conversations
- Conducted more than 112 proactive patrols after grizzly bears were observed
- We hazed 23 bears away from people, residences, and towns
- Used 89 cracker shells to proactively haze bears and four rubber bullets
- Obtained two Airedale bear dogs (hazed two bears during training with dogs)
- Responded to 95% of human-bear conflicts within 30 minutes
- Over 150 Facebook posts
- We posted all reported grizzly bear sightings to our Facebook page
- Conflict prevention information and outreach on Facebook and popular articles
- We initiated over 91 call trees whenever a grizzly bear was reported for an area
- Obtained 16 grizzly bear DNA hair samples to help determine conflict individuals
- Facilitated over 46 popular media products (TV, newspaper, press releases)
- Created a first-ever FWP Agricultural Brochure aimed at preventing bear conflicts
- Obtained \$5,555 in Vital Ground grant money for conflict prevention equipment



Figure 2: Removing a bone pile that was attracting a grizzly bear near residences and livestock. The carcass driver came on late in 2019 and thus we had to fulfill the need.

Human-Grizzly Bear Conflicts

We responded to over 374 calls regarding grizzly bears during 2019, with 37 of those calls being classified as a human-grizzly bear conflict (Table 1). The primary conflict type for the prairie area is grizzly bears coming too close to human homes – which occurred in 11 occurrences (34% of conflicts). For these instances of “bears near dwelling” there were no obvious unsecured attractants. In some cases where grizzlies were close to homes the bears were using shelterbelts as traveling cover or daybeds. In other situations, there were attractants but were unavailable for bears to obtain. All but one of the bear near dwelling conflicts were resolved with aversive conditioning. We kept grizzly bears out of all towns within our district this year. When situations required trapping - capture efforts were an average of 13.64 trap nights per conflict for 191 trap nights total.

Grizzly bears caused property loss in 18 instances. On the Sun River, in April, one subadult male grizzly killed three registered black angus calves and attacked another three, which required veterinary assistance (additional five were missing). Furthermore, in May, a calf was killed by grizzly bear and her cub on Dupuyer Creek (an additional calf and cow were killed nearby, but Wildlife Service’s was not able to ID the bear). Next, in June, a single pig was killed by a grizzly on Cut Bank Creek. Most serious, **at least 41 sheep were killed by a single grizzly bear** over 5 nights (thus, 5 conflicts) on the Marias River in July. One grain bag was damaged on the Teton River – we consequently electric fenced the bag (Figure 3). One sprinkler was dug up on the Marias Golf Course (property damage). No beehives or grain bins were reported as damaged.

There were two human-grizzly bear encounters, where people met a grizzly while on foot. In one instance the bear did not detect the person. In the other, a barking dog scared the bear off.

Conflicts were concentrated (70%) along the Marias River watershed, which is comprised of several waterbodies including; Dupuyer Creek, Birch Creek, Lake Frances, Dry Fork and various canals or coulees (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Three temporary electric fences strung together to protect further damage to grain bag from grizzly bear.



Table 1: Table summarizing the number of different human-grizzly bear conflicts on the prairie for the 2019 reporting period.

Conflict Type	Count
near dwelling	11
depredation	10
grain	7
encounter	2
garbage acquisition	2
livestock feed acquisition	2
depredation attempt	2
property damage	1
Total	37

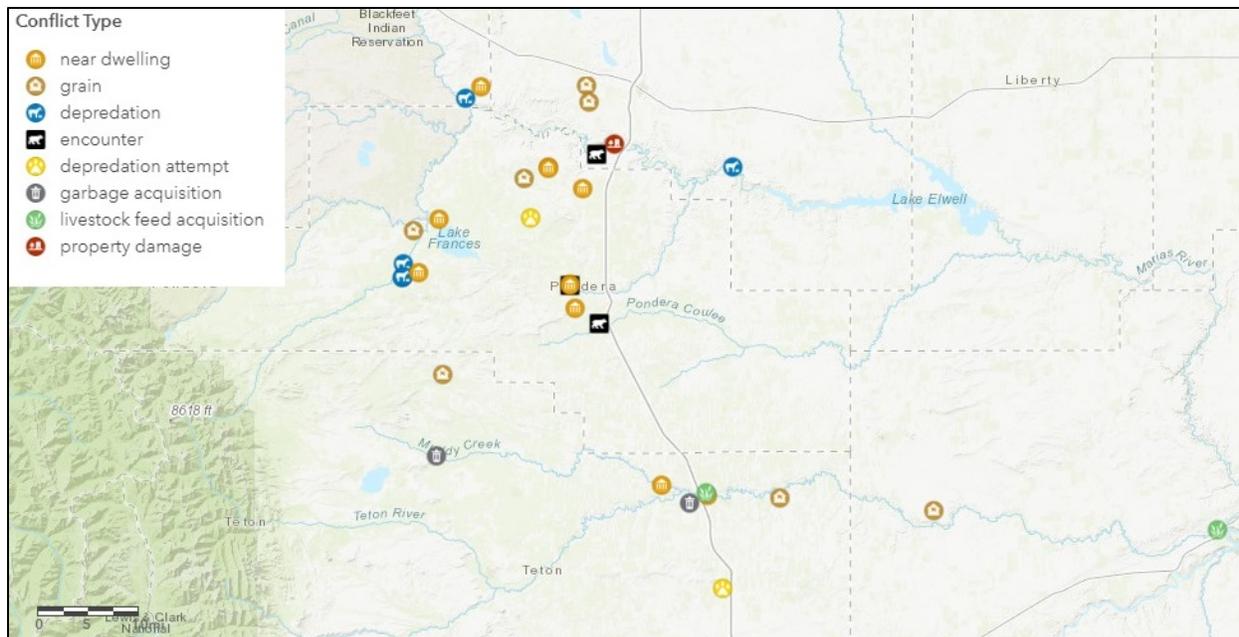


Figure 3: Map of human-grizzly bear conflicts in 2019. (Sun river conflict near Fort Shaw not pictured)

Captures

1. A subadult male was captured on the Sun River due to his involvement with three calf depredations and three calf attacks (additional five calves missing).
2. A non-target subadult male was captured on Dupuyer creek at the site of a calf depredation. It was released on-site with landowner permission (5/18/2019).
3. A non-target adult female was captured on Dupuyer creek at the site of a calf depredation. It was relocated to the Blackleaf WMA (5/19/2019).
4. A non-target subadult male was captured on Dupuyer creek at the site of a calf depredation. It was relocated to the Blackleaf WMA (5/19/2019).
5. A 23-year-old female was captured on Dupuyer creek due to her involvement with a single calf depredation. She was relocated to the North Fork of the Flathead (5/20/2019).
6. A yearling male was captured on Dupuyer creek due to his involvement with a single calf depredation. He was relocated to the North Fork of the Flathead with his mother (5/19/2019).
7. A yearling female was captured as a preemptive action as she was frequenting residences north of Conrad (6/14/2019; figure 5).
8. An adult male was captured and released on-site as a proactive action on Cut Bank Creek near where a hog was killed (7/11/2019). Captured two weeks after depredation occurred.
9. A subadult male was capture and euthanized on the Marias river for killing 41 sheep (7/19/2019).

Grizzly Bear Mortalities

1. A subadult male was captured on the Sun River due to his involvement with three calf depredations and three calf attacks (additional five calves missing). The male was euthanized (4/30/2019) as it was not reasonably possible to remove the threat through relocation.

2. A subadult male was captured and euthanized on the Marias river for killing 41 sheep (7/19/2019). It was not reasonably possible to remove the threat through relocation.

Future Efforts

Obtained approval and funding to initiate a research project testing if livestock guard dogs can keep grizzly bears out of commercial corn fields.



Figure 5: This subadult female was preemptively captured north of Conrad because she was frequenting areas close to residences, but not obtaining human food. She stayed away from people after the relocation to Blackleaf WMA.

Acknowledgements

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